

CT Council of Teachers  
of English Presents the  
2021 Annual Conference



May 22, 2021  
Virtual 8:30-12:30

*The Fire this Time: Bending Toward  
an Antibias Antiracist Pedagogy*



## The Fire this Time: Bending Toward an Antibias Antiracist Pedagogy

### CTCTE Conference 2021



*(The conference title plays on multiple references: The Fire Next Time, a selection of essays by James Baldwin, who is referencing a slave song in which God promises not a flood but fire next time; The Fire This Time, a selection essays about race edited by Jesmyn Ward; and "the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice," from "Sermon at Temple Israel of Hollywood" by Martin Luther King, Jr., who is referencing abolitionist minister Theodore Parker speaking in 1853.)*

In "A Talk to Teachers," James Baldwin suggests a black child first learns of "the shape of his oppression" when he comes to school. He learns "that this structure is operated for someone else's benefit—not for his. And there's no room in it for him." It is a damning condemnation of the null curriculum we offer. Delivered to a group of teachers in October, 1963, and published in the Saturday Review that December, "A Talk to Teachers" comes from a time we might like to think as long ago. That things have changed. That we're doing better. That we English teachers are not racist and don't allow racism in our classrooms and open our doors to students of all colors with open arms, teaching them love and respect for one another. That's what we want to believe. It's true, isn't it? We know better, so we're doing better, right?

Asking the question is the answer.

Compare news of the past year with this from the same essay: Black people "wouldn't dream of calling a policeman. They wouldn't, for a moment, listen to any of those professions of which we are so proud on the Fourth of July." Our world is on fire. We're only just starting to catch on. The America we are teaching is not the same America Black people are living in.

To be sure, we've also been trying. For decades we studied African American literature (and Latinx, LGBTQ+, world...) and put forth considerable efforts to weave multicultural literature into our offerings. It wasn't enough. It isn't sticking.

It doesn't stick because we have been aiming at racism and bigotry on an individual level. Even if all White people were respectful and nice and equitable interacting with others, systemic racism would persist. We need to refocus on institutional applications of racism. We have to look at the structures of curriculum, instruction, and assessment in English Language Arts: curricula that reinforces White as the default norm; instruction that privileges white voices, language, and culture; and assessment that advances White students while suppressing indigenous, Black, and people of color (IBPOC), often relegating them to less rigor, less access, and less opportunity.

As teachers of English, we uphold a professional responsibility for countering systemic racism through antiracist pedagogy. How does that happen? What does it look like? What is a White teacher to do?

The 2021 CTCTE conference *The Fire this Time: Bending Toward and Antibias Antiracist Pedagogy* seeks to explore those questions. Answers are not easy, and discomfort will be the norm. But we can stand by silent no longer, lest we accept culpability in complicity.

We must confront the world on fire, even if we "will meet the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determined resistance." We do so with the grounding ethos, articulated so brilliantly by Baldwin, that "the obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it—at no matter what risk. This is the only hope society has." English teachers, let's be the actors of hope.

Kris Nystrom, VP and Conference Chair



# Program

8:15 - 8:25

Conference Overview

8:35 - 9:25

Gholdy Mohammad

9:30 - 10:15

Tricia Ebarvia and Dr. Kimberly N. Parker

10:20 - 11:05

Workshop sessions

11:10 - 11:55

Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides

12:05 - 12:30

Ibi Zobi

12:30 - 12:35

CTCTE 2021 Preview

Dr. Muhammad is author of the best-selling and groundbreaking book *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy*, which draws upon historical practices of African American literature societies to reframe teaching and learning. Layering together a four-level framework for literacy instruction, Dr. Muhammad unveils a pedagogy that lifts the genius of all students, particularly those traditionally marginalized by default American education policies and practices.

A former middle school language arts and social studies teacher and district curriculum director, Dr. Muhammad is currently an associate professor of Language and Literacy at Georgia State University and director of the Urban Literacy Collaborative and clinic. She is 2021 NCTE Outstanding Elementary Educator in the English Language Arts Award recipient, 2016 NCTE Janet Emig Award recipient, and 2014 NCTE Promising New Researcher Award recipient.

A graphic of a lit matchstick with blue smoke rising from it, positioned vertically on the right side of the slide.

Gholdy Muhammad

*Dr. Kimberly  
N. Parker*



*Tricia  
Ebarvia*



#DisruptTexts is a grass-roots, teacher-driven effort to reframe an equitable English language arts curriculum that reflects the students it serves. Tricia Ebarvia and Dr. Kimberly N. Parker, along with Lorena German and Julia E. Torres, founded the #DisruptTexts around four principles: interrogating biases, centering BIPOC voices in literature, applying a critical literacy lens to teaching practice, and working in community with other antiracist educators.


Tricia Ebarvia is an English teacher at Conestoga High School in Pennsylvania and Co-director for the PA Writing and Literature Project. She is a 2016-18 Heinemann Fellow and 2019 NCTE High School Teacher of Excellence Award recipient.

Dr. Kimberly N. Parker taught English for 17 years and prepares preservice teacher as assistant director of Teacher Training at the Shady Hill School in Massachusetts. She is a 2016-18 Heinemann Fellow and 2020 NCTE Outstanding Elementary Educator in the English Language Arts recipient.





Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides

A lit matchstick is positioned horizontally across the lower middle of the slide. Bright orange and yellow flames are at the tip of the match. From the flames, thick, translucent blue smoke rises and curls upwards, filling the upper right portion of the slide. The background is a solid dark color.

Dr. Sarigianides teaches young adult literature and methods courses at Westfield State University in Massachusetts. She is coauthor with Carlin Borsheim-Black of *Letting Go of Literary Whiteness: Antiracist Literature Instruction for White Students* (Teachers College Press, 2019), which explores key dimension of antiracist literature teaching and learning.

Dr. Sarigianides taught middle and high school English for 10 years before teaching graduate English Education courses at Teachers College, Columbia University. She currently studies ways white teacher candidates can best learn and apply antiracist literature instruction and is a regular presenter at NCTE and American Education Research Association (AERA) annual meetings.

Ms. Zobi is the *New York Times* Bestselling author of *My Life as an Ice Cream Sandwich* (Penguin, 2019), a middle-grade debut; the Young Adult novels, *American Street* (HarperCollins, 2017), a National Book Award Finalist and *New York Times* Notable Book, and *Pride* (HarperCollins, 2018), a contemporary remix of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. She is also the co-author of *Punching the Air* (HarperCollins, 2020) with prison reform activist, Dr. Yusef Salaam of the Exonerated Five, and editor of *Black Enough: Stories of Being Young & Black in America* (HarperCollins, 2019).

Ms. Zobi holds an MFA in Writing for Children & Young Adults from Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her writing has been published in *The New York Times Book Review*, the *Horn Book Magazine*, and *The Rumpus*, among others. As an educator, she is the recipient of several grants from the Brooklyn Arts Council for her community-based programs for teen girls in both Brooklyn and Haiti.

Ibi Zobi



# Workshop Descriptions



## **Amanda Gorman's Inaugural Poem: Occasional Poetry as a Call to Action**

Carol Jago, California Reading and Literature Project, UCLA

Amanda Gorman believes that poetry is political and that reading and writing are instruments of social change. This workshop will explore occasional poetry, particularly "The Hill We Climb" as a vehicle for making a difference in the world. It is my hope that participants emerge from the workshop confident in their own ability to read and teach poetry. They will also be in possession of many practical ideas for teaching occasional poetry including a protocol for having students write occasional poems of their own.

CTCTE Host: Cathy Sosnowski

## **Building, Listening, & Looking: Using Best Practices, Collegial Collaborations & Current Scholarship to Rethink Assessment in the 9-12 Classroom**

Stephen Staysniak, Metropolitan Business Academy, New Haven Public Schools

We are at a pivotal moment in how we use assessment in the English classroom. If we honor best practices, continue to share and collaborate, and keep up with scholarship, we can create learning models and assessments that are more engaging, meaningful, and just—nothing short of what our students deserve. I will share influences from the Performance Assessment Consortium in New York City, which provides a counter-narrative to standardized testing, and consider April Baker Bell's work on linguistic racism, shifts in how the 'traditional' essay format is taught, and the national trend to move away from standardized assessments for college admissions.

CTCTE Host: Nicole Martone

## **Critical Consciousness & The Canon: Adopting a Critical Humanities Approach**

Kathryn Cubano, West Windsor Plainsboro Schools, NJ

Beth Pandolpho, West Windsor Plainsboro Schools, NJ

This session invites participants to apply what we call a "critical humanities approach" to the teaching of canonical texts. This approach encourages the development of critical consciousness, and aims to shift students' positionality to the canon as well as to school and learning. It aims to move beyond neutralized and depoliticized literature study, and to build the language and schema necessary for students to enter into critical discourse around canonical texts. Participants will receive a resource folder that includes a detailed planning framework for this approach as well as classroom materials.

CTCTE Host: Carolyn Weiser

## **Critical Literacy: Moving the Cannon Forward - Strategies You Can Use with Any Curriculum**

Kaye Bishop, Norwich Free Academy

Jamiah Bennett, Miss Porter's School

The Western literary canon is still the heart of many high school curriculums across the country, but they are not reflective of the student population that the curriculum is meant to serve. When a school has a set curriculum that is not culturally responsive, as the Western literary canon can be, teachers may feel limited in their ability to be antibias while adhering to the expectations of their school. Kaye Bishop, English teacher at Norwich Free Academy, and Jamiah Bennett, pre-service English teacher at Miss Porter's School, will demonstrate how teachers can pursue equity and inclusion within any curricula.

CTCTE Host: Kris Nystrom



# Workshop Descriptions



## Raising Consciousness in the Predominantly White Classroom: Critical Intersectionality as Praxis for Antiracist Literacy

Keith Newwine, Syracuse University

Geoff Bender, West Genesee High School & State University of New York, College at Cortland

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* offers young adults the opportunity to learn about the history of systemic racism in America through Morrison's compelling imaginative recreation and so should be central to upper-level ELA curriculums. This presentation provides a methodology for allowing young adults to read with and against Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. We call this methodology "critical intersectionality." The virtue of an intersectional model is its power to incorporate a range of identity variables in the exploration of crucial questions related to social justice. Our overview provides examples of how students discern these points, examine their depths, and develop self-changing relationships with them.

CTCTE Host: Martha Curran

## Pushing the Margins to the Mainstream: Critical Pedagogy Inside and Outside the Classroom

John Whaley, Fairfield Warde High School

Rich Novack, Fairfield Warde High School

Two white male teachers will speak about the tensions and successes in bringing anti-racist, critical pedagogies to the affluent, predominantly white public high school where they teach. In part one, *What critical pedagogies exist in your classrooms?*, they will share how they brought anti-racist theory into practice. In part two, *Who can you rely on, and how are you supportive?*, they will share how they support each other without burdening BIPOC colleagues or falling into white exceptionalism or saviorism. In part three, *Which organizations can you join or begin?*, they will share how their "critical hope" inspires their teacher-student activism.

CTCTE Host: Jennifer Sinal

## Inclusion Through Literature Circles

Jessica DiBuono

At the middle and high school level, teachers have many opportunities to run literature circles that offer choice, diverse voices, and connect to students' lives. In this presentation, I will describe ways that teachers can effectively run skills-based literature circles that offer more inclusive and diverse texts. We will explore these opportunities and engage in discussions about designing practical book clubs or literature circles that create a more inclusive and diverse curriculum.

CTCTE Host: TBD

## (Re)membering History: Using Own Voice Picture Books to Repair Broken Historical Narratives About African Americans and Native Americans

Nicholl Montgomery, Boston College

Tiffeni Fontno, Boston College

(Re)membering the past (Dillard, 2012) is an imperative for our current education system. In this panel, we will discuss how contemporary children's literature can be used to fill in the gaps that are prevalent in our national story. We will examine texts such as *Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre* by Carole Boston Weatherford, *We are Still Here!: Native American Truths Everyone Should Know* by Traci Sorell, and *The Bell Rang* by James Ransome. We will discuss how they can be used with elementary through high school students to ensure that all students have a full understanding of the past.

CTCTE Host: Dina Secchiaroli

# Workshop Descriptions



## **Say What? Building Antibias Vocabulary Skills in the English Language Arts Classroom**

Trinity Klein, Weston High School

Nucleus. Isosceles. Past participle. Theocracy. Teachers do not expect students to label the parts of a cell, identify geometric shapes, diagram a sentence or define a system of government without first ensuring student mastery of subject area academic vocabulary. Yet, in English classrooms students are routinely asked to discuss antibias topics without establishing a common language for these complex conversations. This workshop provides space for teachers to explore the academic vocabulary building skills necessary to have honest and intelligent dialogue. Participants will leave empowered to create opportunities for antibias academic language mastery that supports essential conversations in our modern day classrooms, because words matter.

CTCTE Host: Jaime Allesandrine

## **Shifting the Focus: How Student Choice Can Help Educators Move Towards an Anti-Racist Curriculum**

Liza Escott, E.O. Smith High School

In *How to Be an Antiracist*, Ibram X. Kendi says, "Pain is usually essential to healing. When it comes to healing America of racism, we want to heal America without pain, but without pain, there is no progress." This workshop provides an opportunity for sharing fears, concerns, and successes when shifting toward an anti-racist curriculum. Attendees will leave with a variety of sample activities, links, approaches for texts such as *American Street* and *A Raisin in the Sun*, ways of adapting British Literature to include choice novel units, and ideas for teaching essays through a Critical Race lens.

CTCTE Host: Meredith Sinclair

## **A Working Definition of Reading Identity: Moving Away from Label-Led Decision Making to Student Led Decision Making**

Jennifer Scoggin, Trusting Readers, LLC

Hannah Schneewind, Trusting Readers, LLC

Autonomous models position students to "relinquish control of their literate identities" (Hall, 2012) compromising their ultimate success or sense of belonging at school. Instead, we invite teachers to center students and their identities as readers in order to harness the power of a strengths-based approach to literacy instruction. We introduce our working definition of reading identity. We share the Cycle of Conferring which provides a practical framework for teachers to honor reading identities and create instructional pathways for students that move beyond the curricular attacks that result from not centering the lived experiences and relevant work of students themselves.

CTCTE Host: Lucia Fonseca

## **Conference Debrief: An Informal Discussion on Gholdy Muhammad, Tricia Ebarvia, and Dr. Kimberly N. Parker**

Aiyah Moustafa, CTCTE Equity and Inclusion Officer

Following the presentations from Gholdy Muhammad, author of *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy*, and two of the founding authors of the popular and influential #DisruptTexts social media platform and movement Tricia Ebarvia and Dr. Kimberly N. Parker, you know you want to process! Let's talk. Let's propel our new thoughts and energies into potential action. Join this discussion as an extemporaneous, collaborative unpacking and debriefing of new ideas and information we can use in our classrooms and districts.

CTCTE Host: Joanne White

# Safe Space Participation Agreement

## Virtual Conference Participation Agreements

- *Be respectful.* Listen when it is time to listen.
- *Be considerate.* Make space for all voices to rise.
- *Be human.* Foster positive relationships with all participants.

This online platform is a safe space.



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- Eligibility for awards for yourself and your students

If you have any questions about membership, events, or publications, please email us at [ctctela@gmail.com](mailto:ctctela@gmail.com).

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